



Disaster and Emergency Management Resources

How to Prevent a House or Building Fire

- Avoid smoking in bed, or when drowsy or medicated. Bed linens are highly combustible. When fires start in beds, it is easier for persons to be burned and highly likely that they will suffer severe burns.
- Provide smokers with deep, sturdy ash trays. Douse cigarette and cigar butts with water before disposal. Smoking materials are the leading cause of residential fire deaths in the United States.
- Keep matches and lighters on a high shelf, away from children, preferably in a locked cabinet. Children are fascinated by fire and may play with matches and lighters if they are not kept out of reach.
- Make sure your home heating source is clean and in working order. Many home fires are started by poorly maintained furnaces or stoves, cracked or rusted furnace parts, or chimneys with creosote buildup.
- Use portable heaters in well-ventilated rooms only. Keep blankets, clothing, curtains, furniture, and anything that could get hot and catch fire at least 3 feet away from all heat sources. Plug heaters directly into the wall socket and unplug them when they are not in use. Portable heaters use oxygen and produce potentially toxic gases. It is best to keep them well-ventilated to avoid gas buildup.
- Use kerosene heaters only if permitted by law in your area. Refuel kerosene heaters outdoors only and after they have cooled. Kerosene has a low flash point. If mistakenly dripped on hot surfaces, it can cause fires.
- Have chimneys and wood stoves inspected annually and cleaned if necessary. Chimneys and wood stoves build up creosote, which is the residue left behind by burning wood. Creosote is flammable and needs to be professionally removed periodically.

- Keep the stove area clean and clear of combustibles, such as towels, clothing, curtains, bags, boxes, and other appliances. Combustible materials near stoves may catch fire quickly when your attention is elsewhere.
- Wear short or restrained sleeves when you are cooking. Loose sleeves can catch fire quickly.
- Conduct a home hazard hunt. Many things around the home can be fire hazards. Taking time to look for and eliminate hazards greatly reduces your risk.
 - Check electrical wiring in your home. Fix frayed extension cords, exposed wires, or loose plugs.
 - Make sure wiring is not under rugs, over nails, or in high-traffic areas.
 - Outlets should have cover plates and no exposed wiring.
 - Avoid overloading outlets or extension cords.
 - Buy only appliances and electrical devices that bear the label of a testing laboratory such as Underwriter's Laboratories (UL).
 - Store combustible materials in open areas away from heat sources.
 - Place rags used to apply household chemicals in metal containers with tight-fitting lids.
 - Buy only testing laboratory-labeled heaters and follow the manufacturer's directions. Heaters that have gone through rigorous testing and are approved for use in the home are less likely to cause fire.

Adapted from resource material developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the National Commission for Environmental Health